

Today and Tomorrow . . . By Walter Lippmann

The Fierceness of Red China

THE QUARRELL IN the Communist camp has become ever more ferocious, and from our point of view ever more interesting. We have to begin by making a guess as to why, as the military situation in Viet-Nam grows worse, the Sino-Soviet quarrel becomes fiercer. There must be something of very high importance at stake between Moscow and Peking.

My guess — there is no way of knowing — is that the intensification of the quarrel is due at bottom to Red China's fears that there is in the making a Soviet-American understanding for the containment of China. If this came about, China would be strategically surrounded. There would be the Soviet nuclear power along its northern frontier and there would be American nuclear power, allied in some measure with the Soviet Union, along the Chinese southern and southeastern frontiers.

CHINA'S FEAR that this might happen could explain a number of otherwise puzzling things. It could explain Peking's recent accusation that the Soviet Union is an American stooge conspiring to end the war and deprive Peking of a total victory. It could explain the fact, which has now been confirmed officially by the Soviet Union, that Peking has been opposing and obstructing Soviet military aid to North Viet-Nam. For if the Russians appeared as the principal military defend-

er of Hanoi, they would acquire a principal influence on the settlement of the war.

Moreover, if my guess is correct, the Chinese government believes that if the war can be made to go on to the bitter end, the result will be to expel the Soviet Union and the United States from its southern borderland. Without having to fight itself, Red China would then fall heir to the wreck and ruin of Viet-Nam, and the historically anti-Chinese people of Viet-Nam would be decimated and prostrated.

THESE ARE HIGH stakes, and only high stakes can account for the fierceness of the Chinese campaign against the Russians. If the hypotheses is correct, the first practical conclusion we must draw from it is that we must not be overzealous. The Soviet Union is still a Communist society, and we must not embarrass it by treating it as if it had turned renegade. We should act on the principle that the Soviet Union is a mature Communist society, and because of that — since both of us are mature societies — we have a common vital interest in co-existence and world peace.

It is not for us to make ostentatious and dramatic overtures to Moscow. But we can move with deliberation to remove the minor irritations, as for example, over the payments to the U.N. Beyond this, we should let other governments make the running while we hold on in South Viet-Nam and ponder the crucial and unavoidable decision of whether to encourage negotiation among the Vietnamese.

The fierce intransigence of Red China is a fact.

Potentially and theoretically it threatens everyone. The great question is whether Red China's militancy and expansionism will be moderated in the course of time or intensified during the few years that remain before Red China becomes a nuclear power. It is a gamble, of course. But I myself am betting that moderation will appear in the course of time and natural evolution and can be brought on by patience, firmness and diplomatic skill. The alternative is preventive war.

Back in the late 1940s when the Cold War had begun, when Stalin was at his worst, I was invited to lunch in the Pentagon with a high official. The object of the lunch was to persuade me to write articles in favor of launching a preventive nuclear war against the Soviet Union. Stalin, I was reminded, was a villain who was moving step by step toward the conquest of the world. There was no stopping him by measures short of nuclear war, and as we had the air force and the nuclear bombs while Stalin did not yet have them, it was our duty to strike him before he struck us. Not to do so would be criminal negligence. If we flinched and waited, we would lose the future.

I did not write the articles, but the luncheon made a profound impression on me, particularly in the years which have followed during which the Soviet Union has emerged from Stalinism. We gambled correctly that Stalinism would pass, and we won that gamble. We shall have to take the same gamble with Red China.

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